

3: Robequain--94

S-5

(no date) 1944

Laotians

116, 496, 177. 49

France

636. 49

"Laos still lacks railways. Some years ago surveys were completed on the projected line from Tan Ap to Thakhek, which had been selected as the shortest and most convenient route between the coast of Annam and the Mekong. About twenty kilometers of rail were laid from Tan Ap as far as Xom Cuc, and téléférique built to hoist material and supplies from the workyards to Mu Gia Pass which will be traversed by a tunnel at an altitude of 370 meters; a service road was built in order to assure the easy maintenance of the téléférique. The roadbed beyond Thakhek was also started, but budgetary difficulties caused the stoppage of work."

"The colonization schemes sponsored by the Indochinese government in other parts of the peninsula have not touched Laos. The local administration, however, has been encouraging small-scale settlements. The Société de l'Houle Pakhout has placed 12,000 coffee plants upon the plateau of Boloven, and in the same region a group of natives has set out 100 hectares of kapotiers. The colonization of Laos cannot be initiated until the railroad from Tanap to Thaklek is completed, which will link up the interior to river navigation [sic] upon the Mékong. Here, as elsewhere, one of the chief problems is inadequate labor supply. (58)

58. Rapports au grand conseil, pp. 85 ff."

seems to be a cloak of verdure with deep, harmonious folds. Its bed is deeply cut and scattered with rocks and rapids as far as a point upriver from Vientiane where it attains an average width of 900 meters. Enormous calcareous rocks strung out like beads or laid on in cliffs like a veneer alternate with graceful beaches, and here and there hamlets cling to the hillsides which are lit up, as if by a flame in the sun, by the gilded spire of a pagoda. . . 133

After describing a sharp bend to the south it flows peacefully towards Savannakhet between low banks which are now sandy and now covered with vigorous vegetation. It is 1500 meters in width, and its waters are deep enough in this level stretch to permit steamboat navigation all year long. Downstream from Savannakhet stretches a sudden succession of staggered rapids over a /7/ length of about 160 kilometers. These are the "Khemmarat." The current is extremely violent and forms eddies and whirlpools, while an irregular channel winds in the midst of the rocky bed. "The yellowish waters break against the rocks with a dreadful noise. Men have fled its banks, and the great trees of the forest lean from both sides over the abyss, into which their weight often drags them. A few daring fishermen have made themselves homes in the crags of the rocks, but these unfortunate creatures scarcely have time to flee when the first rains come, so great is the rapidity with which the waters of the river rise" (1).

1. De Carné, Voyage en Indochine et dans l'Empire chinois.

When it leaves the rapids the Mekong widens out (two kilometers), with isles of verdure scattered here and there, and again becomes navigable as far as Khong, the old capital of Lower Laos. Its banks grow higher again, and many villages rise in the midst of /134/ rich and fertile plains. It reaches a width as great as eight or ten kilometers and gives birth to an important group of islands, including the island of Khône which is famous for its waterfalls which bring navigation to an absolute halt. A railroad has been built /496/ across the island by the French administration to serve as a connecting link /8/ between the level stretch of Khong and that of Kratié (Cambodia).

Laos ends at South Khône, and the coastal reach of the Mekong, which belongs to Cambodia and to Cochinchina, begins.

The great river is fed from the left by multiple tributaries, the chief ones of which (Nam-Ou, Nam-Ngum, Nam-Ka-Dinh, 133 132

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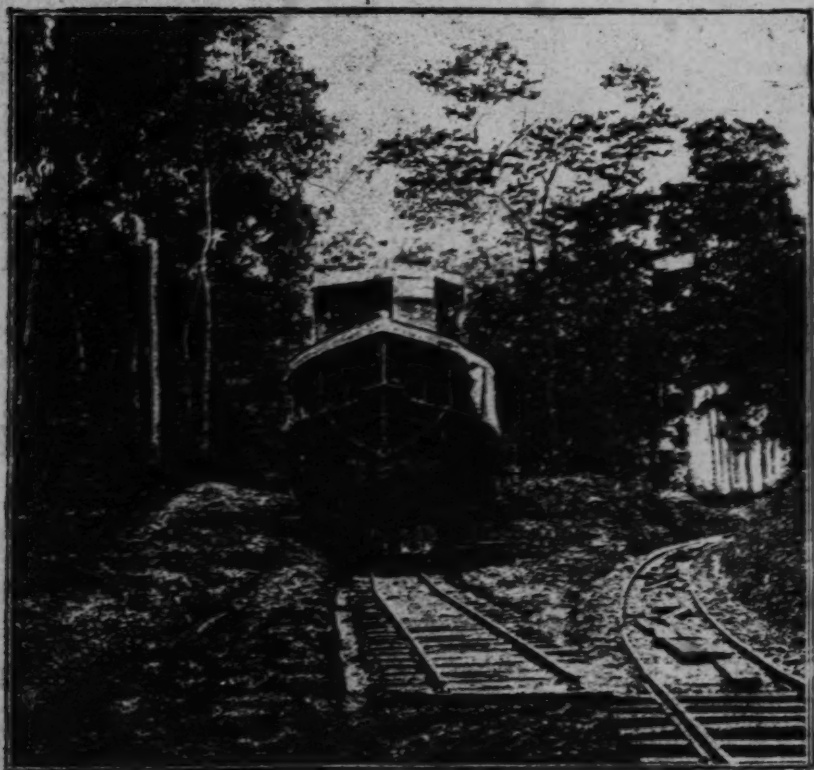


Fig. 20 /p. 70/ The Garcerie crossing the island of Khone
from one reach to another (1897).
(Courtesy of M. Blanchet.)

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Fig. 21 /p. 71/ A critical moment--the passage of the Trentinian across the island of Khone (1897). (Courtesy of M. Blanchet.)

439 [437] The conclusion to be drawn from the preceding tables is
178 not favorable toward orienting Laotian trade towards the ports of French Indo-China. It is evident that the export trend of animals and products shows a marked tendency to move towards Oubone and Siam. Indeed, Siam's share of total exports from Lower Laos (merchandise and animals), which was 179,627 francs in 1898, rose to 381,185 francs in 1899. This was an increase of more than double.

On the other hand, we see that the share of Annam, Cochinchina, and Cambodia in this same traffic, which was 699,712 francs in 1898, fell to 466,477 francs in 1899, representing an approximate decrease of one-third.

[496] The causes of this persistent and increasing orientation of Laotian trade towards Siam are perhaps to be sought in the opening of the railroad from Bangkok to Korat (1) as well as in the customs system of

(1) The king of Siam inaugurated this line on December 21, 1900.

French Indo-China.

439 There is no question but that the railroad constitutes a considerable
497 improvement over the old means of transport, as much by virtue of
505 the lower costs and shorter travel time as by the suppression of the dangers and bothers of the cart road from Korat to Bangkok (domestic duties, exactions of the local authorities, robberies, etc.). But are these reasons sufficient to explain or justify the admitted fact?

The River Merchant Fleet [Messageries fluviales] service is, as we have previously noted, the most rapid and least expensive means of transporting merchandise from Luang-Prabang to Saigon. Why then is this service, which is superior even in its present imperfection, scorned by exporters in general and used mainly by importers for products destined for the Europeans in Laos? The answer is a simple one. Exporters would not hesitate to use the Mekong route and to transport their products to Phnom-Penh or to Saigon-Cholon if, as they can do at Moulemein, at Xieng-Mai, at Nong-Khay, at Bassac, at Oubone, at Korat and at Bangkok, they could obtain [438] supplies there of imported merchandise from various sources to make up the counterpart of their exports. But, besides the fact that they would not be able to find certain special merchandise which is indispensable to them in the French marketplaces, they could not obtain the rest except at an increase of fifty or sixty percent or even more over the ordinary prices in the markets of Siam and Burma which we have just cited.



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Fig. 111 /p.469/ The Khone railway.

[Handwritten scribble]

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653 A credit of 32,500 francs has been established for the construction of [478] these roads in the 1900 budget, and another of 10,000 francs has been set aside for improving the existing roads.

These credits are allocated for meeting the costs of equipment, iron, skilled labor, etc. Current repairs are made through statute labor and payments in kind which all registered persons owe.

Supervision of these projects falls to the inspectors and chief guards of the native civil guard.

With support such as this, it becomes clear that it will be possible to carry out quite large road projects with credits which might seem quite insufficient at first glance. It is true that they will be renewed as the need arises.

3. PRESENT RAILWAY ROUTES

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● "There is only one railway in Laos. It crosses the island of Khone and is used for transshipment of passengers and goods from the lower reach to the Khone-Pakmoun reach and vice versa. It is a narrow railway, with a gauge of one meter. It is 4.5 kilometers long. It was built by the administration and placed at the service of the River Merchant Fleet [Messageries Fluviales]."

4. PROJECTED RAILWAY ROUTES

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653 "A railway is planned which will connect the great middle reach of the Mekong with a seaport in Annam, passing through Ai-Lao, Quang-Tri and Hué. This would make it possible for all the products of central Laos to flow down towards Annam, and avoid for transports in general the disadvantages and dangers of the Kemmarat rapids. Studies for this line were begun in the first days of 1899, and have continued during the dry season of 1899-1900" (1).

(1) Le Laos français, op. cit. [Lieutenant-colonel Tournier (Superior Resident in Laos), "Notice sur le Laos français," in Revue Indochinoise, Hanoi, 1900]

The portion of this line in Annamite territory, that is to say the Quang-Tri-Hué-Tourane section, is included in the schedule of expenditures to be covered by a loan of 200 millions, to the extent of 24 millions. Since it is 195 kilometers long, the cost comes to 125,000 francs per kilometer.

653 [480] Construction of this line was authorized by the law of
December 25, 1898, but its extension to the Mekong, and that is to
say the means of entrance into Laos, is classified among the lines of
third-degree urgency for which routes have scarcely been outlined.

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633 Another railway has also been planned from Binh-Dinh to
Attopeu, with the same third-degree urgency classification as the
line from Savannakhet to Quang-Tri. It seems astonishing that
anyone should have thought, even as a line of third-degree urgency,
of a line which would start from the sea and end in a cul-de-sac,
crossing one of the most mountainous regions which is inhabited by
Kha tribes who are still partly unpacified. It may be that there is
some thought of facilitating, by means of such a line, the exploitation
of the gold and copper-bearing deposits in the region of Attopeu,
even though it has now been established that the best deposits are
located on the Se-Sane, more than 50 kilometers to the south of this
point as the crow flies. It is also to be feared that by reason of the
nature of the terrain this line may cost as much as 200,000 francs
per kilometer, if the conditions of its route be compared with those
of the lines estimated at 125,000 francs.

The projected Savannakhet-Quang-Tri railway does not seem to
be the best solution for creating an entry into Laos and an outlet to
the sea.

In the first place, it is not the shortest and most economical,
despite the low elevation of the ridge of Ai-Lao, which is only 410
meters in altitude.

Besides, Savannakhet has never been a trade center and market
of distribution and transit like Luang-Prabang, Pak-Lay, Nong-Khay
and Bassac.

To be sure, it is an administrative center situated opposite the
market of Ban-Mouk and the seat of the main office of the Cochinchina
River Merchant Fleet Company [Compagnie des Messageries Fluviales],
which has storehouses, a depot, workshops, etc. there. But this
center was built up from nothing scarcely six years ago. The market
of Ban-Mouk is an unimportant one, and the office of the River Mer-
chant Fleet is inaccessible to its steam launches during a large part
of the year.

[481] If Nong-Khay, instead of Ban-Mouk, were located opposite
Savannakhet, there would be an advantage to capturing this great
market in which the major part of the trade of Upper and Middle Laos
is centered, and to turn this trade away from Bangkok to the profit
of Tourane. But one must surrender to the evidence, for Nong-Khay

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Wieder in Lösung

Particulars per page per month, both for the
first and second years, as follows:

1891	1892	1893	1894	1895	1896	1897	1898	1899	1900	1901	1902	1903	1904	1905	1906	1907	1908	1909	1910	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036	2037	2038	2039	2040	2041	2042	2043	2044	2045	2046	2047	2048	2049	2050	2051	2052	2053	2054	2055	2056	2057	2058	2059	2060	2061	2062	2063	2064	2065	2066	2067	2068	2069	2070	2071	2072	2073	2074	2075	2076	2077	2078	2079	2080	2081	2082	2083	2084	2085	2086	2087	2088	2089	2090	2091	2092	2093	2094	2095	2096	2097	2098	2099	2100	2101	2102	2103	2104	2105	2106	2107	2108	2109	2110	2111	2112	2113	2114	2115	2116	2117	2118	2119	2120	2121	2122	2123	2124	2125	2126	2127	2128	2129	2130	2131	2132	2133	2134	2135	2136	2137	2138	2139	2140	2141	2142	2143	2144	2145	2146	2147	2148	2149	2150	2151	2152	2153	2154	2155	2156	2157	2158	2159	2160	2161	2162	2163	2164	2165	2166	2167	2168	2169	2170	2171	2172	2173	2174	2175	2176	2177	2178	2179	2180	2181	2182	2183	2184	2185	2186	2187	2188	2189	2190	2191	2192	2193	2194	2195	2196	2197	2198	2199	2200	2201	2202	2203	2204	2205	2206	2207	2208	2209	2210	2211	2212	2213	2214	2215	2216	2217	2218	2219	2220	2221	2222	2223	2224	2225	2226	2227	2228	2229	2230	2231	2232	2233	2234	2235	2236	2237	2238	2239	2240	2241	2242	2243	2244	2245	2246	2247	2248	2249	2250	2251	2252	2253	2254	2255	2256	2257	2258	2259	2260	2261	2262	2263	2264	2265	2266	2267	2268	2269	2270	2271	2272	2273	2274	2275	2276	2277	2278	2279	2280	2281	2282	2283	2284	2285	2286	2287	2288	2289	2290	2291	2292	2293	2294	2295	2296	2297	2298	2299</
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18. W. S. Van Dine Library of Congress Van Dine

Annex 3

Le document ci-joint est la copie de la page 171.

as the Minister.



telegraph service and by railway in 1900.

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 is no further from Vinh than Savannakhet is from Tourane. In fact, the distance by steamship to Hin-Boun (or Tha-Kek) and from there to Ben-Thuy [Illustration here] (port of Vinh) by way of Nape, the ridge of Tram-Mua and Ha-Trai by railway is only 500 kilometers, whereas it is also 500 kilometers from Savannakhet to Tourane.

It has been objected that the ridge of Tram-Mua, the highest point on the line in question, is at an altitude of more than 1,200 meters, that many calcareous peaks encumber the route, and that the port of Ben-Thuy has a sand bar (that of Cua-Hoi) which leaves a depth of water of only 1.5 to 4.5 meters, depending on the tide.

All of this information is correct, although somewhat exaggerated. The ridge of Tram-Mua is not an insurmountable obstacle, and the road which crosses it leaves the Mekong at the 250 meter level and manages to reach it by rounding the [482] peaks of Pou-Hak and Pou-Kha-Sak and by rising gradually, ascending 1000 meters over a distance of about 140 to 150 kilometers.

Ha-Trai, moreover, which is situated on the river of Ngan-Pho, is at approximately the 100 meter level, and the descent from the ridge requires half a day on elephant back. The slope is very steep, without any doubt, on the Annamite side, since it represents the hypotenuse of a right triangle with a base 15 kilometers long and an altitude of 1,100 meters. It is not such, however, as to make the establishment of a railroad impossible, and cog-railways could also be used, as in Switzerland, at the steepest parts of the route.

Finally, the bar of Cua-Hoi is only an imaginary obstacle. Indeed, it would be sufficient merely to extend the railway beyond the bar, where the foundation is everywhere solid enough, or else to dredge a channel.

From the financial point of view the advantage also lies with the Hin-Boun-Ben-Thuy project, which will cost 30 millions instead of 61. Indeed, expenditures of 24 millions are anticipated for the Quang-Tri-Tourane section, to which 37 millions must be added for the Quang-Tri-Savannakhet section (about 300 kilometers at 125,000 francs per kilometer), whereas if we assume a cost of 150,000 francs (1) per kilometer for the Hin-Boun-Ben-Thuy line (about 200 kilometers),

(1) Cost anticipated for the Vietri-Lao-Kay and Saigon-Qui-Nhon lines.

we are confronted with an expenditure of 30 millions. The difference between 30 and 61 millions is so great that it would even be possible

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185 to anticipate, for the line which we recommend, a much higher cost per kilometer (although this has not been demonstrated) than the cost which we assume.

Both lines--the one from Hin-Boun (or Tha-Khek) to Ben-Thuy and the one from Savannakhet to Quang-Tri--have their partisans. The latter line is more in favor, but we believe that, like its rival, the line from Hin-Boun to Ben-Thuy should be studied by engineers, who, without any preconceptions, would draw up an estimate [483] which could be compared with the other and serve as a basis for evaluation by the government of Indo-China.

In conclusion, when the Hanoi-Nam-Dinh-Vinh section is completed, and if it is joined to the line of which we have been speaking, it will constitute a network connecting the Mekong with Tonkin and eventually with the great central region of China by way of Lao-Kay, whereas the Quang-Tri-Tourane section is destined to remain isolated, with no connection either with the north or the south, for a period of time which is as yet indeterminate (1).

(1) The Superior Resident favors a line connecting Tran-Ninh to the coast:

"The opening of this railway would not bring profit to Tran-Ninh only, and it is certain that the line would be used not only by all officials and travelers who had to reach the upper reach of the Mekong and even the middle reach, but also by the greater part of the merchandise destined for these reaches.

"I have no doubt but that, the day this railway is opened, it will have to be extended to Luang-Prabang, which it will be possible to reach in less than three days from Vinh by this means. Another branch extended from Xieng-Khouang towards Pak-San would give us the whole Mekong trade, and the problem whose solution we are now pursuing would then be solved. There would no longer be any need to seek a route from Luang-Prabang to Tonkin, from Outhene to Vinh, or from Savannakhet to Hué, and there would no longer be any need to explore the possibilities of navigation through the Kemmarat rapids or between Vientiane and Luang-Prabang. The two reaches, separated by rapids which have heretofore been regarded as an obstacle to commercial steam navigation, would be opened up and would be less than three days' distance from a seaport.

"On that day the colonization of Laos will take a giant stride, and the land will be wholly opened to all the enterprises

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[13] which the difficulty of communications is now impeding."
(Bulletin économique de l'Indo-Chine, loc. cit.)
[Translator's note. Probably refers to December 1900 issue,
"Rapport du Résident supérieur sur le Tran-Ninh."]

5. POSTAL AND TELEGRAPH SERVICE

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206 The telegraph network in Laos is quite complete. At the present time only three commissionerships are not served by a telegraph line, those of Tran-Ninh, the Hua-Pahn and Darlac. All the other provinces possess one or several telegraph offices, where postal service is also provided.

Examination of Plate VI will show the extent of the telegraph network in Laos. The lines are divided into two sections: the northern one which is under the jurisdiction of the Annam-Tonkin central office, and the southern one which is attached to the Cochinchina-Cambodia central office. [484] The two sections are not connected with one another, but soon will be. Tonkin will then be in communication with Cochinchina by means of a line which will cross all of Laos from north to south.

When this result has been achieved, that is to say when the Luang-Prabang-Vien-Tiane section has been completed, the Laotian network will be 2,283 kilometers long: 1,168 in Upper Laos and 1,115 in Lower Laos.

[505] By the terms of a contract between the administration and the Cochinchina River Merchant Fleet Company [Compagnie des Messageries Fluviales], the latter was made responsible for the transport of postal dispatches on the Mekong as far as Luang-Prabang (1). Outside

(1) This company receives an annual subsidy of 300,000 francs from the government of Indo-China for this purpose.

of the region of the river, and even in certain stretches served by the Company where service can be made more rapid, the administration has recourse either to human carriers or to pirogues.

505 6. SERVICE BY THE RIVER MERCHANT FLEET [MESSAGERIES FLUVIALES]

Transport for merchandise and passengers is provided on the Mekong as far as Luang-Prabang by the Cochinchina River Merchant